InterspecieS

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Slow Dreaming

I wish to express my gratitude to all the people who have responded with funds to assure Interspecies another year of existence. One donor has pledged $2000 as a matching grant. For more information about how you can help us meet this challenge, and to find other interspecies news, please take a look at page 6.

—Jim Mollman

A Moscow newspaper describes a school in far northwestern Russia established within the Murmansk Research Oceanarium. Instituted to provide children with an education in marine mammal studies, each day after sit-down classes are complete, students congregate by the pool to be taught "to communicate with dolphins and seals by a faculty of oceanarium trainers". Despite the misplaced value of defining interspecies communication as an exercise in captive training, with an objective that includes seals balancing rubber balls and dolphins jumping through hoops, the visionary potential remains.

It's easy to dream up a faculty from a parallel universe comprised solely of members and correspondents of Interspecies.com. For a class entitled "Where Captivity Ends and Family Begins", I propose they recruit the interspecies team of Mike Dalton and his blue and gold macaw, Arielle. Arielle knows some 3,000 words and phrases, thousands more than the bird currently listed in the Guinness Book of World Records. In a May 2003 story in the Saint Petersburg Times, journalist Robert Farley wrote of a visit to Mike and Arielle's home. He reports:

Curious to see how much of Arielle's daily talking session this reporter can interpret, Dalton hands me a blank sheet of paper. Then the session begins. As Arielle begins to speak, Dalton hits 'record' on the tape player, picks up his own notebook to scribble furiously, checking his watch to record times. The parrot seems to me to be making random squawks. So what on earth is Dalton writing? I close my eyes, straining to make out some words, but my page is mostly blank. At one point, he let's out a hearty laugh. Arielle, it seems, has cracked a joke. The chirping goes on for 20 minutes. When it ends, Dalton turns off on the recorder.

I show him my pad. Not much there besides "Polly want a cracker" and "pretty bird." I also thought I heard Arielle bark like a dog.

"It's OK," Dalton consoles, "Not many people can pick up her speech. It's like parents who understand their toddler when others can't." Then he rewinds the tape and hits play, quickly finding a place in his notes, allowing me to follow along. Darned if it doesn't sound like what he's written. Here's some of what Arielle had to say:

"Water. Back. Come up. I love you. Alright. You want to play? Quiet. Happy (after she's eaten)." And this mocking exchange: "Wow. You can talk? Polly want a cracker." She laughs. And the joke? Arielle at the time was headed for the fruit tray, which he sometimes warns is too hot. "Be careful," she says, apparently mocking his warning. And I was also right about the barking. "Woof, woof. Good dog. Woof."

When Dalton tells her, "Arielle's cute," Arielle replies, "I'm cute."

"She knows pronoun substitution," he explains.

Dalton believes that Arielle's communication is far more advanced than any scientist has ever given birds credit for. In fact, he can not get scientists to take his research seriously. Apparently, around the turn of the century, a horse named Clever Hans challenged the prevailing attitude about animal intelligence. Clever Hans amazed crowds when he tapped his hoof to answer simple math questions. Four plus two? He'd tap six times.

But Clever Hans was eventually exposed. A scientist discovered his math skills evaporated when he wore blinders, or if his owner did not know the answer to the question. Turns out, the owner was giving unintentional facial cues about the correct answer. It's a story that animal behaviorists often retell to debunk claims made by folks who try to read too much into animal communication. Even those who conduct animal behavior studies in laboratories with strict controls are viewed with skepticism. And here is Dalton, with no formal animal behavior schooling, conducting his research in his home. He tells me his e-mails to scientists go unanswered. Even his wife, Patricia, a kindergarten teacher, says she does a lot of eye rolling. But Dalton continues undaunted. He notes that many great discoveries were made by accident, by so-called amateurs. "Scientists don't respect animals," he says. "They don't treat them like equals. I talk to Arielle like she's another person."

Particularly vexing to Dalton is the lack of acknowledgement from the world's leading researcher on parrot communication, Irene Pepperberg, who has ignored his letters. Pepperberg's own parrot, Alex, can correctly identify an array of objects, and researchers are now trying to teach Alex to read. "I think there's no doubt parrots use some of their words purposefully," says Donald Griffin, who spent more than three decades researching animal cognition. "But I have yet to see convincing evidence that birds can string words together correctly."

It was at the suggestion of an old professor of his, that Dalton began recording Arielle's speech, and he now has more than 150 hours worth. Dalton takes Arielle for daily walks through the neighborhood, talking to her in a falsetto voice, which is easier for her to hear and duplicate. During a walk, Dalton got an inkling that he had a remarkable bird as he spoke to Arielle about water. Crossing a sidewalk puddled with water, Arielle lowered her head nervously and said "wet."

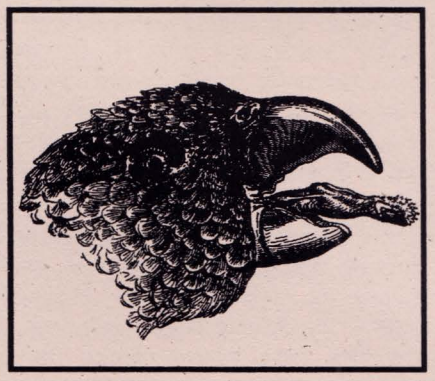
"That blew me away," he said. "If the bird can transfer meanings to new situations, we now have communication." Dalton has determined that the first level of communication is simply repeating words they are taught. The second level is being able to use those words in proper context. And the third level is actual conversation."

Never Being Sure

Cognitive Science is especially confounding to those of us who promote a benign relationship between humans and animals. Evidence of intellect offers a glimmer of hope that such research must eventually assure greater protection for animals by altering the cultural perception of, at least, the smarter species. But the medium is the message. Cultural attitudes towards animals can never transform via the messages of cognitive science as long as the test animals are kept in the medium of cages where they are withheld the essentials of food and companionship to make them respond correctly.

In another study described below, some of the same cognitive scientists who ignored Mike Dalton and Arielle, have designed a cunningly clever battery of tests to study animal cognition.

As reported in the Washington Post (11/23/03), journalist Guy Gugliotta asks his readers to imagine cutting a banana in two pieces and then telling a



hungry 5-year-old to pick one piece. We anticipate the child snatching the biggest one. But cut the banana precisely in half, and the decision comes more slowly. The child's doubt is an example of one of the most sophisticated mental talents that humans possess, called cognitive self-awareness, or "thinking about thinking", the ability to wonder whether one is making the "right" judgment.

Humans do this effortlessly, and now there is new evidence that some animals can do it too. In a series of experiments, researchers at the University of Buffalo NY showed that rhesus monkeys and a bottlenose dolphin chose "I'm not sure" with virtually the same frequency as humans when offered difficult choices.

In one test, a bottlenose dolphin was trained to press a lever when it heard a low tone, and another lever when it heard a high tone. At first, the dolphin was so enthusiastic that it kicked up swirls of water as it raced to the levers. But when researchers raised the low tone until it approached the high tone, "he would creep in because he didn't know what to do," said researcher John David Smith, a psychologist at the University at Buffalo. "It was the dolphin equivalent of scratching its head." The dolphin would then resort to a third lever, indicating uncertainty. "They know when they don't know. You up the stakes and give them a behavioral way to opt out, and they take it. It's lovely to watch."

"It's new and it's ground-breaking," says Emory University neuroscientist Lori Marino. "It is strong evidence that there is a similar cognition pattern in monkeys, humans and dolphins to the same task."

But others, such as behavioralist Clive D.L. Wynne of the University of Florida, dismisses the study as one more unsuccessful effort to bestow greater significance

on actions that simply result from environment and training. Wynne noted that the animals had to be trained to perform the tasks, and were given food when they succeeded and "timeouts," with no testing, when they failed. More important, he said, the uncertain response led to a resumption of testing that guaranteed a win on the next try. "It's difficult to say the dolphin is thinking if it's guaranteed a follow-up fish."

The test's persnickety detractor makes the crucial point that these test animals are virtual prisoners, given no opportunity to simply walk away.

The reporter also expresses something salient when he compares the mature test animals to a human five year old. Most cognitive tests on captive animals focus subliminally on determining how well animals reflect human capabilities, with no consideration for the reverse. Think of all the research that teaches language to dolphins using hand signals. Success is an adult dolphin who ably mimics a kindergartner.

All such tests make me appreciate the ethical and participatory methods of our own interspecies research. We focus entirely on enticing wild animals to join our activities as creative peers. The animals get to participate, but only if they so wish.

Dream Hunting

In my last book *Beluga Café*, I described another model of interspecies education called "dream hunting", employed by several Native American cultures. Regard this Northern Athapaskan account.

> They camped at the place he dreamed about and one of his sons killed the fat moose he was told about in a dream. When they went out to retrieve the moose, the son asked his father, "Aba, father", how did you come to dream that I would get that fat moose? You dreamed right.

In my ongoing search to discover a viable alternative to bland modern maturity, I have started paying close attention to my own dreams. The Athapaskan model prods me to reach beyond the uncompromising havoc that the sleeping mind creates out of the raw material of identifiable people, places, and circumstances, asking me to discover a practical use for all the disembodied linkage that materializes within the fog of slumber. So far, no matter how hard I try, I am only rarely able to assimilate dream messages directly into my waking life.

I lay some of the blame on Columbus and all the other European thugs who destroyed so much traditional knowledge. How might any of us today employ our dreams differently, if our European predecessors had honored the Native Americans instead of enslaving them. Imagine if you can, American high schools following an Athapaskan rather than an English public school curriculum, devoting class time learning how to communicate through dreams with moose – or at least crows, dogs, and roses – with far less time spent dissecting frogs and sentence structure.

Imagine how the world would be transformed, how much our relations with the animals would be altered. How different would be the interspecies classes in Murmansk, the studies at the U of Buffalo, even the US Navy's pathological yearning for sonar. Imagine a new kind of pet industry. And the end of hunting as entertainment.

Hunting, Athapaskan or otherwise, is a violent intoxicant. What was once a technique for survival, today becomes disjointedly venal when taken up by Native American males driving much too fast down a potholed path they mistakenly believe will lead them back to their own lost heritage.

Amidst October 2003's jubilant news that the Makah whale hunt has been shut down in its second level of appeal, another news report from Alaska's largest newspaper, was sent me by Interspecies.com member, Courtney Vail of the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society. My immediate reaction to it was that the next time you send a check to some worthy whale saving organization, consider that the destruction you are paying someone else to stop, may be subsidized by your own taxes.

Parrot, Panamanian pot, 1500

The Healthy Food

Reported by Doug O'Harra of the Anchorage Daily News (11/13/03).

Here's a miracle meal. An excellent source of protein chock full of vitamins. Extra high in iron and other important minerals and laced with those omega-3 fatty acids that drive down cholesterol and boost overall health. Even better, the people who eat it say it's tasty and gives a spiritual boost. The miracle food? It's the Alaska beluga whale, an ancient source of food in more than 50 villages along the Bering Sea and Arctic Ocean. And according to hunters, health officials and biologists meeting last week with the Alaska Beluga Whale Committee, a chunk of aged beluga skin with blubber, may be one of the soundest meals available to coastal Natives and their families.

"To me, it gets me more healthy," said Allen Atchak Sr., a whaling captain from Stebbins who feeds his family of seven children lots of beluga. "I don't ever get sick. I don't ever get bad colds. I think it's medicine."

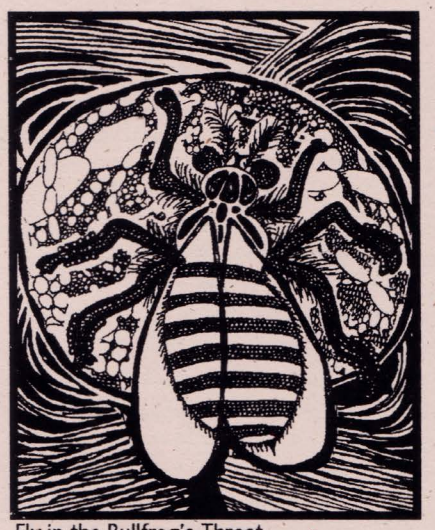
"It's always good to catch whales," added Albert Simon, a beluga hunter from Hooper Bay. "That's why not too much is wasted." Atchak, Simon and about 40 other hunters, scientists and visitors discussed the nutritional benefits and preparation of beluga whales during the group's annual meeting last week at the Hotel Captain Cook in Anchorage. Hunters also shared harvest reports and observations from the past season and talked over research ideas for 2004.

About 65,000 whales live in four Alaska stocks in the Bering Sea and Arctic Ocean. Alaska Natives take 200 to 400 of them each year in hunts co-managed by the committee and the National Marine Fisheries Service under the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act. These whales are genetically separate from the 300 to 400 belugas listed as depleted in Cook Inlet near Anchorage. With about $200,000 per year of federal funding, the committee has compiled 16 years of detailed harvest records, monitored and reduced struck-and-loss rates, sponsored aerial surveys and pioneering satellite tagging projects, and provided more than 900 tissue samples for genetic analysis by scientists at federal laboratories. Last year, the group won a national Environmental Hero Award from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The theme this year was the benefits of eating whales.

Those benefits are enormous, said Dr. Jim Berner, director of community health with the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium. Berner told the group emphatically that eating beluga whales offers incredible nutritional rewards. It is true that, like other marine animals, belugas have been found to build up toxic amounts of mercury, Berner said. But they also have elevated levels of the mineral selenium and vitamin E that may help counteract mercury. Someone eating food harvested from the ocean off Alaska would be far better off than someone eating only processed food bought in the grocery store. "This diet has sustained Alaska Natives for thousands of years, and we're recommending it," he told the hunters.

Keep Slowing...

These days, our dream of a slower life get gobbled up by a macro-economy unwilling to abide culture without itself as pilot. Let us hope that before the whales vanish and our dreams diminish to a whimper, the human species musters enough resolve to refurbish the potholed path that leads us to a life of grace.



Fly in the Bullfrog's Throat

Let us all consider the new, hopeful, movement known as "Slow Life." As Interspecies' sister organization, Planet Drum Foundation reports in its occasional newsletter, the four Japanese cities of Karegawa, Tajimi, Yasaduka, and Gifu have set aside one month a year to focus on what they call "Slow Life".

The cities define it as a lifestyle that is contemplative and simple, valuing human and environmental health more than the economic bottom line. Karegawa City has taken the lead, declaring itself a "Slow Life City" by promoting eight slow principles for government planning.

Analogous to the less politicised concept of "a sense of place", the Japanese Slow Life movement focuses on how people transport, clothe, feed, heal, house, and educate themselves. It seeks slower alternatives to everything from industry to aging, viewing human mental and social health as connected aspects of nature's health. While the Movement keeps one eye focused on reviving traditional Japanese art, food, and ritual forms, it encourages any cultural practice that cultivates a grounding with nature. For more info, their website is **www.japanfs.org**.

Word of the Slow Life is spreading like lightning. In my own small town of Friday Harbor Washington, in October 2003, a group of 150 locals came together for a weekend of discussion about alternative energy, noise pollution, wild lands, and especially community. The immediate result is the website: **navigatingourfutures.org** administered by longtime Interspecies member, Bruce Conway, who is another terrific recruit for the Murmansk faculty.

...And Slowing

Another member of Interspecies.com, author Evelyn Adams explores the slow life in a series of essays that have been appearing weekly in a Pacific Northwest newspaper over the past several years. One of her columns neatly sums up the dream of the potholed path. If you'd like to order her book *Wild Talk*, email eadams@fidalgo.net.

The red-legged frog lay splayed across the trail, flattened in a tire track.

I was on my morning walk, thinking about the workshop I was to give that evening about how to connect more fully with our island home. Slowing down was a big part of the picture, and I was tempted to take the crushed frog with me as testimony to the harm done by hurrying. But it seemed wrong to expose the poor body any further, even to good purpose, and so I moved it off trail and covered it with a fern.

It was a morning bent on driving home themes, apparently, for as I walked further down the trail, a woman wearing headphones ran by with a wave. Hmm. Even though I don't run the trails or wear a headset, the scene felt uncomfortably close to home. Far too often I use my time in the woods to hurry through for optimum exercise, or there's a song I just heard on the radio playing relentlessly in my head, or I'm turning everything from tough questions to grocery lists over in my mind. If I'm not in a physical rush, I'm in a mental one, and must constantly remind myself to slow down and be present.

Slowing down may be one of the best things we can do for the place we live and, ultimately, for the planet. If we don't take the time to really notice our natural world, we'll notice instead the bleak evidence of our indifference. It's much easier, after all, to do damage to something that hasn't got a name or a voice or a life history. But when we slow down enough to really see and hear, when we begin, for instance, to pick out individual plants from the blur of green along the trail or to learn what the different birds are saying, we give wonder a chance to grow, and it's wonder that nourishes connection and concern.

I recently interviewed some folks living on the islands in northern Puget Sound who've taken the concept of slowing down to a level largely unknown in today's world. One couple on Waldron Island, for instance, spent 13 years clearing two acres of their land, learning along the way invaluable things about the local soil, plants and the relations between both. A neighboring couple took 18 years to decide whether or not to fell a big cedar near their house. Across the way, a pair of Orcas Islanders studied their beach property for 15 years before deciding on a way of growing oysters that would benefit both the shore and the water.

Of course, we can't all devote such large amounts of time to understanding our place before acting upon it, but we can make an effort to regularly apply the brakes. Try taking a two-year-old along on a trail and let her set the pace. If you don't know or can't borrow any two-year-olds, set aside an hour to unplug the TV

and computer, take the phone off the hook, and shift on your own into toddler time. Sit by a backyard plant and look at it as if you've just dropped in from Mars. Touch the leaves, stem and blooms. Notice how the sun plays on the plant, what insects visit, how the wind moves through it. Let your focus bring you back to "those old days," as Robert Lowell once wrote:

> When the balancing of a
> Yellow butterfly on a thistle bloom
> Was spiritual food and lodging For
> the whole afternoon.

In Italy, over 30 towns have joined *Citta Lente* (Slow Cities), a movement that rejects today's whirlwind lifestyle in favor of a slower, more attentive pace. I enjoyed playing with the idea of a similar crusade here, which I called *FidalGO SLOW*. Members would have to agree to walk whenever possible, foreswear fast food, cars, and boats, and commit to tide-pool sitting, stargazing, and plant or animal-watching at least once a week. Here on the island, where nature is such a palpable presence, too much speed dishonors rhythms set by the surge of the tides, the uncurling of Indian pipe in the forest and the fawn lily's return. An L.A. or even a Seattle pace is as much out of sync here as holding bike races in the forestlands.

"Where is the life we have lost in living?" asks the poet. Although I didn't take the body of the run-over frog with me to my workshop, I did pass on its message. Several weeks later, I was walking the same trail when I came upon a bit of broken-off branch shaped uncannily like a slug with outstretched horns. It sits on my desk now as a reminder to slow down, stay present, and be conscious of the life so easily crushed in living.

A Matching Grant

The plea for financial aid expressed in the last Interspecies Newsletter has prompted a positive response. Support arrived from wealthy folks, and also from a small town journalist, a peace activist, and a retired housewife. We thank all of you for helping to assure a grounded 2004. And keep it coming.

As mentioned on the front page, Interspecies has just received a matching grant for $2000. While feeling enthusiastic about this opportunity to develop new sources of funding, the possibility of failing to make the match remains rather daunting. Please, if you have the wherewithal to match this amount yourself, in full or in part, or if you have any contacts who might be willing to help us meet this challenge, please email Interspecies at beluga@interspecies.com or call Jim Nollman at 360.378.5186. We have until February 1st to find a match.

EXPO Proposal

Interspecies has been selected to develop an event for an EXPO in Nagoya Japan, starting in March 2005. The promoter anticipates fifteen million visitors, with participation from 119 countries.

The main area is called "Love & Earth Plaza", with a stage and a large screen. Interspecies is being asked to provide either a performance, or an interactive display for the Plaza.

This is a remarkable opportunity for Interspecies to showcase an ecological vision of the oceans and cetaceans for one of the largest public gatherings ever produced in Japan. After initial discussions with the promoter, we have proposed three scenarios for possible production.

1. Interspecies Performance:

An 80 minute performance by Interspecies' Jim Nollman, of computer generated music composed of 100% whale, dolphin, and other underwater animal sounds. This music has already been performed several times in 2003, including a sold out performance for the International Whaling Commission in Berlin Germany. We also plan to develop an animated version of Mark Fischer's "wavelet graphs" in order to show the underlying physical structure of the sound for large screen projection. We are now in discussion with European video artist Tina Zimmerman, whose work focuses on water, waves, and currents. And if a swimming pool is made available, we are asking EXPO to host an event with the audience floating in the pool, with music transmitted entirely through underwater speakers.

2. Interactive Kiosk:

A computer screen with headphones. A visitor puts on the phones, presses an onscreen button to hear many different animal sounds. Press another button to loop a specific sound, and another one to layer the loops to create techno music. The visitor can burn a CD of his or her own music as a souvenir. And once a day, the best music of the previous day will be played from the main stage, using Fischer's wavelet graphs and/or Zimmerman's video art for visuals. Besides dolphin and whale sounds, audio samples include elephants, birds, insects, seals, monkeys, even lobsters. To design the software for the Kiosk, Interspecies will collaborate with Native Instruments in Berlin Germany.

3. Cetacean Internet Concert.

Jim Nollman, accompanied by various Japanese musicians, will perform live music from the EXPO stage once a day. Utilizing underwater speakers, hydrophones and an innovative

internet connection, the concert will be transmitted from the main EXPO hall, directly into the water near wild dolphins at Mikurajima island southeast of Tokyo or near humpback whales at Ogasawara Island. The immediate cetacean response will be transmitted back over the internet to be transmitted into the main EXPO Hall.

In other words, we propose not only whale sounds, and not only human music, but a real time interaction between cetaceans and musicians performed onstage at EXPO.

Media Reviews

Spoken Here

Travels Among Threatened Languages, By Mark Abley. [Houghton Mifflin, 2003]

Plumbing the depths of cetacean language, naturally demands an education of the varieties of human language. This book offers an incisive overview of all the many ways human beings communicate, specifically focusing on the tragedy of language extinction. The author emphatically differs with the prevailing linguistic view that all people think precisely the same way, even when their languages offer remarkably differing views of the universe. The book is written as an Odyssey to several places where people are striving to keep a traditional language alive and spoken (including Mohawk, Celtic, Yiddish, Boro) ,as a first condition of keeping their culture intact.

...Nicaraguan sign language dates only from the 1980's – when deaf children brought together for the first time by the Sandanista government that that aspired to educate them but had no idea how to do it – created a linguistic system of their own and then began to transmit it to their elders.

...In Venezuela, Alexander Humboldt was shown a talking parrot. It was an old bird, a feathered survivor. The local people insisted they did not understand what it said. When Humboldt asked why, he was told the parrot spoke the language of the Ature people, [who had recently been decimated by Spanish disease]. The Ature language had died out among the humans. It was last heard coming from a bird's beak.

...Before the creation of the world, many believe that God chatted with the angels in Hebrew

...Boro verbs include:

onguboy: tp love from the heart
onsay: to pretend to love
onsra: to love for the first time
gobray: to fall in a well unknowingly
serrom: to examine by slightly pressing

We live on an island with limited film rental. To remedy the lack, we recently subscribed to the Internet DVD service called Netflix. We highly recommend it to anyone with a keen appreciation for film. Here's two recent viewings that closely reflect the greater vision of Interspecies.

– Editor

Powaqqatsi

A film by Godfrey Reggio with music by Philip Glass

Many have seen the classic film, Koyanisqqatsi, yet this companion to it remains practically unknown. Koyannisqqatsi literally means "Life lived out of balance, and Powaqqatsi means "a way of life that preys on other beings to sustain itself." So while the former film presents a frenetic vision of modern life and technology gone astray relying on a masterful technique of repetitive sounds and slow and fast motion footage, this companion presents a lingering vision of people in the third world working and playing to a gorgeous score of lyrical music.

Winged Migration

A film by Jacques Perrin and Jacques Cluzard

Disney developed an early vision of nature films in the 1950's with such classics as The Living Desert showing a generation of children how animals live in ecological communities. Then Cousteau and National Geographic independently re-spun the genre, granting scientists and their technology equal billing with animals and habitat. With a few notable exceptions, the nature film has been in decline ever since.

Now this film arrives from France presenting an important new vision of nature film making that tells the story without the usual techno-babble that praises the science but mars the evocative beauty of the images. What's new here is a minimal narration, just enough poetry to give a good idea of what our eyes are feasting upon. The story of bird migration is told from the bird's own perspective.

When we do encounter humans, they are not heroic scientists, activists or even eco-villains, but farmers, hunters, and children who interact with the migration in process. None of these people are there to be interviewed, but to be drawn as the birds perceive them.

The images of geese and cranes in flight, of puffins and gannets swooping from the sky captures the essence of birdness, in a manner we all seem to know from our dreams.

You want to see this film in a theater.